



The Board of Park and Recreation Commissioners of Mecklenburg County, North Carolina, met at Jetton Park in the Waterfront Hall, located at 19000 Jetton Road, Cornelius, NC on September 8, 2015 at 5 p.m.

PRC MINUTES
September 8, 2015
Picnic, Meeting and Park Tour

Attendance:

PRC Present:

Elaine Powell, Chair
 Kendel Bryant, Vice Chair
 Sheryl Smith
 John Leonard
 Ed Barnhart
 Aubin Guinness
 Abe Early
 Heidi Pruess
 Brian Cox
 Jim Garges, Director, Park and Recreation
 Michael Kirschman, Deputy Director, Park and Recreation

PRC Absent:

Tristan McMannis
 Doug Burnett
 Vacant – Central 2
 Vacant – North 2

Call to Order:

The meeting was called to order at 5:45 p.m. by Chair Elaine Powell, which was followed by the pledge of allegiance.

Welcome and Introductions:

Chair Powell welcomed all to the September 2015 PRC meeting and asked each Commissioner/Staff person to introduce themselves. Included in the introductions were three newly appointed Park and Recreation Commissioners:

- Abe Early – A 10-year resident of Charlotte and native of North Carolina. His interest in serving on the Park and Recreation Commission stems from his 8 year old son and his involvement in coaching as well as being an avid biker.
- Heidi Pruess – A former Mecklenburg County Employee in LUESA and is an environmental professional by trade.

- Brian Cox – Retired after 31 years with Mecklenburg County including 17 years in Park and Recreation.

Chair Elaine Powell expressed her appreciation for having such a diverse group of people on the PRC and is especially happy to have two former County employees to join the Commission. She shared that she is very proud of the fact that the image of the Park and Recreation Commission has changed over the years from a political stepping stone to a dedicated and strong team interested in advocating for Park and Recreation and making a difference in the community. She encouraged the new Commissioners to seek out the expert advice of Director Jim Garges and staff at anytime. Chair Powell also shared that the new Commissioners would be appointed to serve on an Advisory Council(s) and were encouraged to look at these various councils to determine where and what would work best for them.

Appointments – Advisory Councils –Applicants

Motion was made by Commissioner Barnhart to increase the Golf Advisory Council Membership to 13 members, which was seconded by Commissioner Bryant and approved unanimously.

Motion was made by Commissioner Barnhart to appoint **Norman Mitchell** to a 3 year term on the Golf Advisory Council, expiring 6/2018, which was seconded by Commissioner Smith and approved unanimously.

Commissioner Barnhart deferred on making appointments to the Greenway Advisory Council until the October PRC meeting.

Director's Report

Director Jim Garges expressed on behalf of the staff how much they have enjoyed working with the Park and Recreation Commission, noting they have worked hard over the past few years, are very active and said it is a good time to be a part of the PRC. Jim reminded all that we still have two vacancies to fill; Central 2 and North 1.

Jim shared that the Department is enjoying one of the largest expansions of the Park system in many years. Lots of projects are going on and new things are happening at Park and Recreation, new staff, young people with new ideas and innovation in terms of programming and lots of great partnerships, making is a fun time to be on the PRC.

Playground Safety Course: Directory Garges recognized Jeff Robinson, Division Director of Park Operations, and Staff for recently completing the playground safety exam. This exam is taken periodically and provides the Department with several certified playground inspectors to make sure that all of our playgrounds meet the new standards and are safe for all children. Jim shared that the Department plans to resume pre-recession conversations with CMS to help with making sure their playgrounds are also safe.

Capital Update/County Manager Construction Tour: Lee Jones, Division Director of Capital Planning Services shared that 69 FY14 – FY16 projects are currently in the planning, design or construction phase. Recently he and Director Garges took County Manager, Dena Diorio, on a tour of 5 of our projects under construction:

- The Aquatic Center - scheduled for completion in May of 2016
- Friendship Sports Complex – out of the 2004 bond referendum and scheduled for completion in April of 2016

- McDowell Creek Greenway Phase II – a huge stream restoration project with 3 miles under construction
- 1st Ward Park – scheduled to be substantially complete in November 2015
- McAlpine Creek Greenway – scheduled for completion in November 2015

Director Garges shared that the Department will be getting an additional greenway planner to assist with the Department's goal of "50 by 20" (50 miles of greenway by 2020). The PRC can look forward to many ground breakings and dedications. In addition, Jim shared that not all projects are new. The Department also received \$5.3 million in the FY 16 budget for deferred maintenance which will include upgrade projects such as the Waterfront Hall at Jetton Park.

Master Plan Update: The 2008 Master Plan Update will be on the October 6 BOCC agenda for Board approval. After approval the Department will present the updated Master Plan to the Towns and to the City of Charlotte.

Prior to placing the Master Plan on the BOCC agenda, Jim and Deputy Director, Michael Kirschman, have met individually with each of the County Commissioners to present the Master Plan so that any questions could be addressed prior to its being placed on the agenda. Because the Master Plan is based on citizen's needs and has geographic distribution, most of the Board members were more interested in where we are and where we thought we would be and their questions were more about the process of developing the priorities, the community survey and standards. Land acquisition was also a topic, of which the board members are very supportive.

Project Bidding/Capital Funding Process: Director Garges explained the following regarding the current bidding climate and changes to the Capital Funding Process for the Department:

- With the upturn in the economy, contractors are back to work and prices are going up. Many projects may not even get a bid or the bid is 10 to 20 percent over because they are too busy.
- To address this, the Department has received permission from the Board to bundle projects to create a larger project and attract a larger contractor. In addition the Department will also ask the Board to allow flexibility between the allocated funding and projects to allow us to move forward when the bidding is consistently over. If funding turns out to be too low to complete some projects at the end of the fiscal year, the Department will place those approved projects in the next budget cycle for a funding adjustment.

NRPA: Jim shared that he will be attending two days of the NRPA conference in Las Vegas. The only other staff attending this year's conference are those who will be presenting. Deputy Director, Michael Kirschman, and Chris Matthews, Division Director of Nature Preserves and Natural Resources, will be attending as presenters.

Summer Wrap-Up: Jim shared that the Department is wrapping up a very successful summer of programming and looking forward to fall sports programs.

Biddleville Cemetery: Chair Elaine Powell asked the Director to give an update on the Biddleville Cemetery for the benefit of the new Commissioners. (The following is the excerpt from the August PRC minutes on the Biddleville Cemetery and a short update.)

The Biddleville neighborhood residents have recently expressed interest in revitalizing the cemetery as well as concerns associated with less than desirable activities in and around the cemetery and the Five Points Park. As a result, Jeff Robinson, Division Director of Park

Operations, and Director Garges met with Commissioner Leake and Councilmember Austin along with residents of the neighborhood to discuss possibilities for the revitalization. Ideas include: working with the church for records of burial, development of an information kiosk, work with the Historic Landmarks Commission, finish and continue clean-up, get as many graves identified as possible, install appropriate fencing, possible lighting and clearing out more of the woods surrounding the cemetery.

Director Garges shared that this is a neighborhood cemetery containing graves as old as 1908. Next steps include working with the Historic Landmarks Commission to have the site designated historic and completing a survey to establish the cemetery boundaries.

Commissioner Smith said she has spoken with Dr. Carter of Johnson C. Smith University, who has agreed to put out to the faculty his support of engaging students in helping research and identify graves as a service project at the Biddleville Cemetery.

Confederate Monument Update: The Confederate monument has been enclosed in a lexan case to protect it from further vandalism.

Waymer Center/Torrence-Lytle School: Chair Powell asked Director Garges to share information regarding the Torrence-Lytle School and The Waymer Center gym controversy. Jim shared the following:

The Waymer Center is a gymnasium in the Pottstown community located in southern Huntersville and part of the historic Torrence-Lytle School; the first African-American high school in Huntersville which opened in 1937. The school and surrounding buildings are located in the David B. Waymer Park, a 13-acred county owned park.

The Waymer Center is County owned and leased to the Huntersville Parks and Recreation Department. The County is responsible for the exterior of the Waymer Center and Huntersville is responsible for the interior. On a recent review of The Waymer Center the interior was found to be in such a state of disrepair that it was deemed unsafe. The County offered to sell the gym to Huntersville for a ceremonial fee, but the Town did not want ownership. With an off-the-cuff estimate of between \$2 and \$3 million for foundation-to-roof renovations needed for extended use, the Department's initial recommendation was to demolish the building. This recommendation created a highly emotional stir in the Pottstown community resulting in a community meeting with the Department and neighbors. The following options were suggested, but were met with disapproval from the community:

- Invest a minimal amount of money in the gym and still have a building that does not service the needs
- Demolish the building and invest the money into park improvements
- Invest money into the Torrence-Lytle School

The Department will meet with community again, but will need to go in with a number to do minimal repairs and a number to do it right, or, suggest putting the money into the Torrence-Lytle School or park improvements. However, the fate of the Waymer Center will be a Board decision.

The School is designated Historic and owned by the Charlotte-Mecklenburg Historic Landmarks Commission. The commission plans to stabilize the school's original building by removing asbestos, repairing the leaky roof and replacing broken windows and then continue to pursue

looking for a redevelopment partner. (Dan Morrill, Landmarks Commission's consulting director). The Waymer Center, which isn't considered a historic landmark, isn't part of those plans.

Chair Powell felt that the PRC will get questions from the community about this issue and encouraged them to speak with staff if they need information before responding.

Consent Items

Motion was made by Commissioner Smith to approve all consent items, including the Park and Recreation Commission minutes of August 11, 2015, which was seconded by Commissioner Bryant, and approved unanimously.

PRC Reports and Requests

Chair Powell:

- Noticed that all the mayoral candidates are highlighting parks in their campaigns.
- Participated in a Park and Recreation Bio-Diversity trip of National Parks on the Blue Ridge Parkway. These programs are great for bio-diversity study, social interaction and recreation.

Commissioner Bryant:

- Reminded the Commissioners of the upcoming Partners for Parks Annual Awards and Sponsor Social and encouraged everyone purchase a ticket to attend. (Invitations have been sent out to the new commissioners) Tickets are \$50.00 and the event is October 14, 2015 at 5:30 p.m. at Dressler's.

Commissioner Barnhart:

- The 51st Festival in the Park will be held in Freedom Park September 25 – 27. For more information please visit their website here: <http://www.festivalinthepark.org/>
- Public meeting regarding the Little Sugar Creek Greenway section, Huntingtowne Farms Park to I485. The meeting will be at the Queens University Sports and Conference Center at Marion Diehl Park off of Tyvola Road on October 12 at 6 p.m.

Adjournment

The meeting adjourned at 6:45 p.m.